

SHIR HA SHIRIM – The Song of Songs
an English version by Len Fellman to be sung to the trope melodies
from Joshua R. Jacobson's CHANTING THE HEBREW BIBLE
based on the translations of Ariel and Chana Bloch, H.L. Ginsberg, Marcia Falk,
and the J.P.S. Tanach, the Jerusalem Bible, and the New King James Bible.
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Chapter 1

1:1 The Song of Songs, which is of Solomon.

2 [Let him kiss me] with the kisses of his mouth, for better is your love than wine.

3 For the fragrance of your ointments [are so good], oil [poured forth] is your name. Therefore the young women desire you.

4 Draw me: [after you] we will run. He brought me—the king—[into his chambers].

[We will be glad] and rejoice, [you and I]. We savor our love more than wine; rightly [do they want you].

5 Dark I am but lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the pillars of Solomon.

6 [Don't stare at me] [because of my dark] complexion; [it was gazed on] by the sun.

The sons of my mother [turned their anger on me]. [They made me] guard the vineyards. The vineyard belonging to me, I did not guard.

7 [Now tell me]—[reveal to me], since you are loved by my soul: [where it is] that you feed—[where you rest] your flock at noontime?

For why [should I be] [one who loses] the way among the flocks of the shepherds?

8 [If it is not] known [to you], O loveliest of women,

[go then and follow] the tracks [made by the sheep], and graze [your little goats] beside the tents of the shepherds.

9 To a mare in the chariots of Pharaoh, [I liken you], my beloved.

10 Fair are your cheeks [with plaited wreaths], your neck [with strings of jewels].

11 Earrings of gold [we will make for you], with filigree of silver.

12 While the king [was on his couch], my spikenard gave forth its fragrance.

13 A bundle of myrrh is my beloved [to me], between my breasts lying all night.

14 A sheaf of [henna flowers] is my beloved to me, in the vineyards of En-gedi.

15 How you are lovely, my beloved. So beautiful: your eyes are like doves.

16 [How you are handsome], my beloved. You are so gentle: our bed is always green.

17 The beams of our house are of cedar; and its rafters are of cypress.

Chapter 2

2:1 I [am the rose] of Sharon, the lily of the valleys.

2 Like a lily in [a field of thorns], so is my beloved among the maidens.

3 Like the apricot [among the trees] of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men.

In his shade I delighted to sit, and his fruit was sweet to my mouth.

4 [He brought me] [to the house] of wine; his banner over me was love.

5 [Sustain me] [with sweet pastries]; refresh me [with apricots]. For in the fever of love am I.

6 [His *left* hand] is underneath my head; [and his *right* hand] [holds me close].

7 I hereby charge you, daughters of Jerusalem, [by the gazelles], or by the deer in the field, [that you not arouse] [nor summon forth] love until it has ripened.

8 The voice of my beloved! [Look here], he is coming.

He is leaping [there, over] the mountains, bounding over the hills.

9 He resembles—my beloved—a gazelle, or too, a young wild stag.

See where he stands behind our wall. He gazes through the window, peering through the lattice.

10 Then spoke my beloved, and said to me: [

Get up] [quickly now], my lover, my fair one, come away.

11 For see, the winter is past, [and the rains]—they are over—they are gone.

12 The blossoms have appeared in the land. The time of singing has come. The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

13 [The fig tree] puts forth [her green figs]. The vines in blossom [give off] their fragrance.

Get up [quickly now], my lover, my fair one, come away.

14 [O my dove] in the clefts [of the rock], hidden by the cliff: [let me see you]; [behold your face]. Let me hear your voice.

For your voice is pleasing, and your face is lovely.

15 [Catch for us] the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vines. For our vines [are now in blossom].

16 My beloved is mine, and I am his. He grazes among the lilies.

17 Before there breathes [the break of day], [before are gone] [the shadows of night],
[run away!] You should—my beloved—[be like a gazelle], [or be like] a young wild stag, on the hills so rugged.

Chapter 3

3:1 On my bed, in the night, [I tried to find] the beloved of my soul. I sought him, but I did not find him.

2 I will rise now and roam [around the town], [through the streets] and city squares.

[I will seek him out]—the beloved of my soul. I sought him, but I did not find him.

3 [They then found me]—the city watchmen [who go about] the town. “[Have you seen the one], beloved of my soul, have you seen him?”

4 Scarcely [had I] [passed by them], when I found the beloved of my soul.

[I held him fast]; I would not let him go, until [I brought him] to the house of my mother, to the chamber [of her who conceived me].

5 I hereby charge you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, or by the deer in the field,

[that you not arouse] [nor summon forth] love until it has ripened.

6 Who [is this], that is coming [up from the desert], like columns of smoke,
fragrant with incense, [rare spices and herbs], of all the wandering merchants.

7 [Look and see]: the palanquin (a portable chair) of Solomon, sixty warriors surrounding it, [from among the warriors] of Israel.

8 They are all holding swords, being expert in war. Each with his sword [at his side], against the terror of night.

9 [A palanquin] was made [for him]—for [King Solomon], from the cedars of Lebanon.

10 Its posts he made of silver, its supports of gold, the cushions of purple wool. The inside was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem.

11 [Come out now]; [come and have a look], daughters of Zion, at King Solomon—

[wearing the crown] [that was set] on his head by his mother on the day of his wedding, on the day that rejoiced his heart.

Chapter 4

4:1 Áh, how fine, my love, [how you are] fine! Your eyes like doves, behind your veil.
Your hair like a flock of goats [bounding down] the slopes of Gilead.

2 Your teeth [like a herd of sheep] climbing up [from the washing pool]. [All of them] alike, barren ones, there are none, among them.

3 Like a thread of crimson [are your lips], your words are enchanting. Like a slice of pomegranate [are your cheeks] behind your veil.

4 [Like the tower] of David [is your neck], raised in splendor. A thousand shields hang upon them, all the quivers of the warriors.

5 Your [two breasts] are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, grazing in a field of lilies.

6 Before there breathes the day, [and there flee away] the shadows, [I will make] my way to the mount of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense.

7 You are all fair, my beloved, no blemish is in you.

8 [Come with me] from the mountains, my bride—[with me] from Lebanon do come.
[Look down] from the top of Amāna, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from dens of lions, from haunts of leopards.

9 [My heart you ravish], my sister—my bride, [my heart you capture] [with one glance] of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.

10 How sweet is your love, my sister—my bride, [how much better] than wine is your love, the fragrance of your oils, than any spice.

11 [Nectar from the comb] falls from your lips, my bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue.
The scent of your clothing is like a wind from the mountains.

12 A garden enclosed is my sister—my bride; a well that is hidden, a fountain sealed.

13 [Your limbs spread out] like an orchard of pomegranates, [that is filled] with fruit most excellent, with henna, with spikenard,

14 with nard and saffron, sweet cane and cinnamon, [together with] [every tree] of frankincense,
[with myrrh] [and with aloes], and indeed with all the finest spices.

15 You are a fountain in a garden, a well of *mayim chayim* (living waters), a river [streaming from Lebanon].

16 Awaken [O north wind], and come [O south wind], blow on my garden. [Let its perfume] stream out.
Let him come—my beloved—to his garden. Let him taste its fruit so delicious.

Chapter 5

5:1 I have come [to my garden], my sister—[my bride]. [I have gathered] my myrrh and my spices, eaten of my honeycomb with its honey, drunk my wine, and my milk. [Eat now], my friends, and drink—get drunk on love.

2 I was asleep, but my heart was awake. [I bid you hearken now]! | My beloved [surely now is knocking]! “[Open to me], my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one. For my head [is drenched with dew], my hair with the dewdrops of night.”

3 [But I have taken off] my clothes. [How can I] [put them back on]? I have washed my feet. How then *can* I get them dirty?

4 [My beloved one] [stretches out] his hand for the latch, and my heart leaps for him.

5 Then I arose to open [for my love]. [My hands] [are dripping with myrrh]; my fingers [with myrrh] running onto the handle of the lock.

6 I opened the door for my beloved, but my beloved had turned and was gone.

My soul [went out of me] [when he spoke]. [I sought him out], [but did not] find him. I called him, but he did not answer.

7 [They found me]—[the town watchmen], who patrol the city. They beat me; they bruised me.

They tore my shawl from my shoulders, these keepers of the walls.

8 I hereby charge you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, this [you should tell him]: that in the fever of love, am I.

9 [How is your lover unlike] [any other lover], O fairest of women? [How is your lover unlike] [any other lover], that you so do charge us?

10 My beloved is clear-skinned and ruddy, standing out [among ten thousand].

11 His head is finest gold; the mane of his hair black like the raven.

12 [His eyes] are like doves at the brooks of water, bathed in milk, resting [by brimming pools].

13 His cheeks are like beds of spices, like banks of scented herbs. His lips are like lilies, dripping with flowing myrrh.

14 His arm is a scepter of gold, studded with fine jewels. His belly is polished ivory, inlaid with sapphires.

15 His legs are pillars of marble, set [in bases of fine gold]. His countenance [is that of Lebanon], stately as the cedars.

16 His mouth is most sweet. He is altogether delightful. Such is my beloved, such is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Chapter 6

- 6:1 Whither [has your beloved] gone, O fairest of women? Whither [has your beloved] turned? [Let us seek him] with you.
- 2 My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
- 3 [I am] my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. He browses among the lilies.
- 4 Beautiful [you are], my love, as Tirzah, fair like Jerusalem, awesome [as the stars in their courses].
- 5 [Turn away] your eyes from me, because they overwhelm me. Your hair is like a flock of goats [bounding down] [the slopes of Gilead].
- 6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes [climbing up] [from the washing pool]. All of them alike, [barren ones] there are none, among them.
- 7 Like a slice of pomegranate are your cheeks behind your veil.
- 8 Sixty there are of queens; eighty [of the king's women], and maidens without number.
- 9 One alone is my dove, [my perfect one], the only one of her mother. Pure is she [to the one who bore her].
[They see her]—the maidens—[and call her blessed]. The queens and the concubines praise her.
- 10 Who is that rising, like the dawn, bright [as the white moon], radiant [as the blazing sun], awesome [as the stars in their courses].
- 11 [To the orchard] of walnuts [I went down], to see the new green by the brook.
To see: [had they blossomed]—the grapevines? Had they flowered—the pomegranates?
- 12 And before [I knew it], my soul [had set me] upon the chariots of my people so noble.

Chapter 7

7:1 Do it again, O Shulamite! Dance again, [that we may watch you].

“[Why will you gaze] at the Shulamite, as she whirls [down the row of dancers]?”

2 [How lovely] [are your steps] in sandals, [O daughter of nobles]!

The curves of your thighs [are like] ornaments, work of the hands of a craftsman.

3 Your navel is the bowl of the moon. [May it not lack] [its fill of wine]. Your belly is a heap of wheat, surrounded by lilies.

4 Your [two breasts] are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.

5 Your neck is like a tower of ivory.

[Your eyes] are pools [in Heshbon], at the gates [of that city of lords]. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, that looks toward Damascus.

6 Your head [crowns you] [like Mount Carmel]; the hair on your head [is like royal purple]. A king is held captive by its tresses.

7 How splendid [and how sweet] is love, [among all the pleasures]!

8 There you stand like a palm tree, your breasts [its clusters of fruit].

9 I said, “[I will go climb] the palm tree, [and take hold] of its boughs.

[And oh, let] [your breasts be] [like clusters of grapes] on the vine, the breath of your nostrils like apricots,

10 [and your palate] like wine—[like fine wine]—it glides down for my beloved, smoothly, moving gently the lips of sleepers.”

11 I [am my beloved's]. [For me alone] is his longing.

12 Come, my love, [let us go out] into the fields, [and lie at night] [among the henna blooms].

13 [Let us go early] to the vineyards. [We will see] if the vine has budded, if the blossoms have opened, if the pomegranate is in flower.

[That is where] I will offer the gift of my love to you.

14 The mandrakes [give off a fragrance]. [Back at our doors] [are all kinds of choice fruits], freshly-picked [as well as long-stored].

My love, I stored them away for you.

Chapter 8

- 8:1 If only you were a brother to me, [if you had nursed] at the breast of my mother,
[then if I met you] on the street I [could kiss you], [and none] would despise me.
- 2 [I should lead you], [I would bring you] to the house of my mother, [of her who bore me].
[I would let you drink] spiced wine, my pomegranate wine.
- 3 [His left hand] was under my head; [his right hand] embraced me.
- 4 I hereby charge you, daughters of Jerusalem, [that you not arouse] [nor summon forth] love until it has ripened.
- 5 Who [is this], coming up from the desert, leaning on her beloved?
Under [the apricot tree] [I awakened you]. [It is there] [you were conceived] by your mother. [There it was] she conceived—she who bore you.
- 6 Set me for a seal [upon your heart], a sign [upon your arm]. For as fierce as death is love; as cruel as the grave is its jealousy.
[Even its sparks] [are a raging] fire, [a devouring flame].
- 7 Many waters cannot extinguish love; the rivers can't carry it away.
If a man should give all the wealth of his house for love, [nothing but scorn] would he receive.
- 8 We have a sister, a little one. Breasts she does not have. [What shall we do] for our sister, on the day [she is spoken for]?
- 9 If a wall [she should be], we will build upon it a turret of silver.
But if a door [she should be], we will board her up with planks of cedar.
- 10 I am a wall, and my breasts are its towers. [And so it is] that under his eyes, I have found peace.
- 11 [There was a vineyard] belonging to Solomon, on the Hill of Plenty. He gave the vineyard over to watchmen.
[Each one of them] obtained for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.
- 12 The vineyard belonging to me is my own. [Take the thousand] for yourself, Solomon! [And pay two hundred] to the guards of your fruit.
- 13 [O woman who dwells] [in the gardens]: [My companions] listen for your voice, [Let me hear you]!
- 14 Make haste, [my beloved one]. Be like a gazelle—like [a young wild] stag, [end melody] romping on the hills so fragrant.

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some “poetic licence”, and some willingness on the part of the listener to be “carried” by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these “transtropilations” are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a “window” into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. “cut a covenant”) to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 “beam above the door” rather than “lintel”) to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between “literalness” and “listenable-ness”. A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh or yetiv kadma or pashta gersh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, gersh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts]

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi'i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the “grey bracket” device, I indicate pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which have the combined melody:

mercha/tipcha	kadma/geresh (or: azla, etc.)	mercha siluk
⌞Renew our days⌟	⌞She weeps bitterly⌟	⌞a fire-offering to God⌟

Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don’t strictly match the Hebrew. I also “pad” some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the *leyner*’s cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g’dola* (ר), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the musical phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalsholet*.)

“*Metigah-zakef*” is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a kadma and a zakef katon appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

[Take heed—take care for yourself]

In some trope systems (viz. cantor Moshe Haschel in “Navigating the Bible II”) this is given a distinctive melody—I add extra syllables to fill out the musical phrase (as in “take care” in this example). Haschel’s system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don’t write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name יהוה as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the *leyner* can choose to pronounce it as “God” or “Adonai”.

Warning on the Hebrew text: The text I use for the English trope system is from Aryeh Kaplan; the Hebrew text I display is from Wikisource. Occasionally (but rarely) a phrase will use different tropes in the two systems.

The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:

Aryeh Kaplan, ‘The Living Torah’ (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)
Richard Elliott Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’ (2003)
Everett Fox, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (1997)
The Stone Edition ‘Tanach’ (1996)
JPS ‘Hebrew-English Tanach’, (2nd Ed. 2000), *along with* Orlinsky, ‘Notes on the New Translation of the Torah’ (1969)
Robert Alter, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (2004)
Commentaries in the ‘Anchor Bible’ series
Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)
The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)
The New King James Bible (1982)